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**From:** Woods, Andrea [Woods.Andrea@epa.gov]  
**Sent:** 8/30/2019 5:51:19 PM  
**To:** **Ex. 6 Administrator Wheeler**; Jackson, Ryan [jackson.ryan@epa.gov]; Idsal, Anne [idsal.anne@epa.gov]; Woods, Clint [woods.clint@epa.gov]  
**CC:** Schiermeyer, Corry [schiermeyer.corry@epa.gov]; Abboud, Michael [abboud.michael@epa.gov]; McFaul, Jessica [mcfaul.jessica@epa.gov]; Beach, Christopher [beach.christopher@epa.gov]  
**Subject:** 8.30.19 OOOOa clips  
**Attachments:** 8.30.19 OOOOa Clips.docx

Sir,

Please see clips for the continued coverage of the OOOOa announcement yesterday:

### 8.30.19 OOOOa Clips

#### ABC-Cleveland: EPA proposes rollback of regulations on methane gas

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced proposed changes Thursday for regulations on methane gas emissions, saying it would save the oil and natural gas industry “millions of dollars in compliance costs each year” and “remove regulatory duplication,” while “maintaining health and environmental regulations on oil and gas sources that the agency considers appropriate.”

#### ABC-Denver: Colorado leaders vow to fight Trump administration's proposal to rescind oil and gas methane rules

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser on Thursday vowed to file a legal challenge against a rule proposed Thursday by the Trump administration that would undo federal rules for methane emissions at oil and gas sites implemented under the Obama administration and modeled after Colorado's standards.

#### Albuquerque Journal: EPA proposal would roll back methane rules

The Environmental Protection Agency has proposed changes to Obama-era methane rules for oil and natural gas operations, as New Mexico works toward stronger methane regulations for its booming energy industry. The EPA's proposed changes would reduce or remove methane monitoring requirements from 2012 and 2016 rules for oil and gas pipelines, wells and storage facilities.

#### Bloomberg Environment: “Legal Trouble Could Follow From Trump Guide on Climate Reviews”

Draft White House guidance that allows federal agencies not to consider the climate change impact of their decisions may entangle them in more lawsuits if they follow that advice. Environmental critics and industry supporters alike are concerned the June 26 guidance from the White House Council on Environmental Quality may not be enough to shield federal agencies' decisions on infrastructure and energy projects from being reversed by the courts.

#### Bloomberg News: The Climate Rollback That's Too Much for Big Oil

Carbon dioxide is the best-known greenhouse gas, but methane may be more dangerous: One pound can capture up to 84 times as much heat as a pound of carbon dioxide. A byproduct of fossil fuel production as well as agriculture, it's to blame for about a quarter of all manmade global warming.

#### Colorado Sun: Colorado's attorney general vows to sue Trump administration over methane rule rollbacks

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser on Thursday vowed to sue the Trump administration over its decision to roll back methane rules aimed at curbing the release of potent greenhouse gases from oil and gas sites. The Environmental Protection Agency moved on Thursday to rescind the regulations, put in place under President Barack Obama and modeled after rules enacted by Colorado on the state level in 2014.

#### Columbus Dispatch: EPA's planned rollback of methane regulations met with mixed response

The number of natural gas leaks in Ohio could increase after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday it intends to roll back an Obama-era regulation that required oil and gas companies to use technology to detect and repair leaks from wells, pipelines and storage facilities. "Ohio Environmental Protection Agency should fill in the gap created by this irresponsible rollback," said Trish Demeter, the Ohio Environmental Council's chief of staff.

#### The Daily Signal: Trump Administration Eases Methane Rules on Oil Industry

The Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday that it will undo some of the Obama administration's regulations on methane, which it said could save oil and natural gas producers up to \$123 million through 2025. In 2016, the Obama administration imposed limits on methane emissions from oil and gas production after determining that methane emissions were increasing along with the boom in hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to reach oil or natural gas.

#### Forbes: What Are The Implications Of Increased Methane Emissions?

Earlier today, the Environmental Protection Agency announced plans to reduce federal oversight of methane that the oil and gas industry emits, focus predominantly on volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that threaten public and environmental health, and loosen regulations on the transmission and storage of oil and gas products.\* Essentially, this change would mean that the EPA is no longer required to regulate oil and gas production, which makes up the majority of methane emissions.

#### Inside Climate News: Trump EPA Tries Again to Roll Back Methane Rules for Oil and Gas Industry

In its latest retreat from federal action on climate change, the Trump administration on Thursday proposed eliminating federal requirements that oil and gas companies control leaks of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from new wells, storage facilities and pipelines. In doing so, the Environmental Protection Agency also proposed a narrower interpretation of its legal authority to regulate air pollution from the oil and gas industry.

#### NBC-Lubbock: Arrington, EPA officials announce proposal of new methane rule

On Thursday, Congressman Jodey Arrington (TX-19) joined Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 Deputy Administrator David Gray to announce the proposal of a new EPA rule to provide regulatory relief for energy producers in West Texas and throughout the United States. The proposed rule would eliminate duplicate regulations on methane emissions during the transmission and storage of oil and natural gas, which place an unnecessary and harmful economic burden on small and independent energy producers while providing no environmental benefit.

#### Politico: Methane rollback could handcuff future rules

The Trump administration is pursuing a narrow interpretation of the Clean Air Act that could prevent future presidents from using EPA to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from a wide variety of industries. The approach is outlined in EPA's proposed rollback of Obama-era oil and gas methane rules. The new proposal argues EPA erred in the previous administration by using a catch-all provision of the law to regulate methane pollution from the oil and gas sector, and it builds on questions EPA first raised in its December proposal easing carbon dioxide requirements for newly built coal-fired power plants.

#### Time: The Trump Administration Just Loosened Methane Emissions Rules. Here's What To Know

On Thursday, the Environmental Protection Agency announced plans to loosen regulations on methane, a potent greenhouse gas known to propel climate change. The EPA, which is part of the Trump Administration, said in a press release that it intends to loosen Obama-era national standards on the extraction of oil and natural gas, which had been implemented to limit methane from leaking into the atmosphere.

#### Washington Examiner: Climate hawk House Republicans oppose Trump rollback of Obama methane rule

Leading House Republicans who back federal policies to curb climate change say they oppose the Trump administration's move Thursday to eliminate direct federal regulation of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. "I have

serious concerns about this decision by the EPA," Rep. Francis Rooney of Florida told the *Washington Examiner*. Rooney is the chairman of the bipartisan House Climate Solutions Caucus and the leading Republican proponent in Congress of a carbon tax.

#### Yahoo Finance: Oil Majors Unhappy With Methane Regulation Rollback

On Thursday, the U.S. EPA announced a plan to roll back federal rules on methane emissions for oil and gas companies, a gift that some in the industry are not sure that they want. The decision carries threatening implications for the climate, but it is also not without risk for the industry itself.

#### ABC-Cleveland

<https://www.news5cleveland.com/news/state/epa-proposes-rollback-of-regulations-on-methane-gas>

#### **EPA proposes rollback of regulations on methane gas**

By Olivia Fecteau

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced proposed changes Thursday for regulations on methane gas emissions, saying it would save the oil and natural gas industry "millions of dollars in compliance costs each year" and "remove regulatory duplication," while "maintaining health and environmental regulations on oil and gas sources that the agency considers appropriate."

The Trump administration had proposed easing requirements for oil and gas companies to monitor and plug methane leaks. Methane is the part of natural gas that sometimes escapes through leaks or intentional release during drilling operations.

The Associated Press reported that some in the oil and gas industry are welcoming the proposed changes, while others have said they would rather see increased regulations on emissions, worrying about backlash from those concerned about climate change.

The EPA said its taking comments on the proposal for 60 days and plans to hold a public hearing. It proposed two "co-actions" that differ in some ways but both rescind methane emissions limitations.

According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Oil and Gas Resources Management, Ohio has more than 55,000 producing oil and natural gas wells. There are about 6,300 registered oil and gas companies in the state.

The Division of Oil and Gas Resources Management said that in 2018, Ohio produced more than 22.5 million barrels (42 gallons per barrel) and 2.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Most of the drilling activity takes place in eastern Ohio, in the Utica/Point Pleasant shale.

The state climatologist of Ohio, Dr. Bryan Mark, said methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide but noted it's less abundant and spends less time in the atmosphere.

On Tuesday, Mark, who is a professor of geography at The Ohio State University and a researcher at the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center, discussed the impacts of climate change on the state of Ohio. He said the frequency with which Ohio is seeing extreme precipitation and severe weather events is increasing.

"As we've seen a warming trend, what we've seen in terms of precipitation in Ohio has come down to intensification of rainfall, which means that as the atmosphere gets warmer, it can hold more moisture, but it falls in more concentrated events," Mark said. "We measure that in many different ways, but we can see a very clear signal in the intensification of precipitation in this part of the world, as well as the northeast."

That's been evident in Ohio in the past couple of years, particularly when it comes to record water levels in Lake Erie, Mark said.

"This past year in 2018 was a really wet year," Mark said. "Broke a lot of records in certain counties, came in as the third wettest overall for the state in all of our records. And so when you add that with warm conditions where you're not getting a whole lot of relief, or cold conditions that freeze and then [...] don't really release that moisture from the soil, then you end up with a condition of a lot of runoff and the lakes are kind of a good indicator of that total, watershed-wide water balance."

The year 2018 also brought extreme variability within seasons, Mark said, noting that the month of April 2018 was the ninth coldest April on record in Ohio, while the month of May was the warmest May on record.

"We like to just disentangle weather from climate, weather being instantaneous and very chaotic," Mark said. "But then we think about changes in the overall state of things. If we shift the mean temperature, which we're seeing pretty unequivocally, so average temperature's gone up, you're also shifting the extremes. And if it were just a random occurrence around that mean, maybe you'd expect to see record highs and lows at about the same frequency. But instead what we're seeing is a much higher frequency of the higher temperature anomalies, which tells us it's not really going as a no-change state. It's not just a chaotic thing we're seeing, so we're seeing an actual tendency toward more probability of these warmer conditions."

The changing climate has also had an effect on farmers, Mark said, noting that Ohio has seen an increase of 5 to 15 percent in annual precipitation since 1901, compared to about 4 percent nationwide.

"If you get a lot of moisture in the ground, you need to dry it out before you can get a tractor on the ground to plant, and then similarly in the fall when you're harvesting," Mark said. What you end up with is this change in the time that you can actually be in the field to do your work," about five fewer days each in April and October.

Still, heavier rainfall doesn't always mean wet conditions all the time, especially with warmer temperatures.

"The paradox with warmer temperatures is that you also evaporate really fast," Mark said. "And so droughts can be quite intense, just like we saw this past summer and we're in right now, some mild drought conditions in Ohio, even after that very wet spring."

## ABC-Denver

<https://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/local-news/colorado-leaders-vow-to-fight-trump-administrations-proposal-to-rescind-oil-and-gas-methane-rules>

### **Colorado leaders vow to fight Trump administration's proposal to rescind oil and gas methane rules**

By Blair Miller

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser on Thursday vowed to file a legal challenge against a rule proposed Thursday by the Trump administration that would [undo federal rules for methane emissions](#) at oil and gas sites implemented under the Obama administration and modeled after Colorado's standards.

Obama's administration had argued that its Environmental Protection Agency and Interior Department [could require](#) oil and gas producers to search for and stop methane leaks at their sites under the Clean Air Act. But EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler said Thursday that the new proposed rule is following President Trump's directive to do away with "unnecessary and duplicative regulatory burden from the oil and gas industry."

The move comes as Colorado increasingly tries to improve its air quality along the Front Range , which has been downgraded by the EPA. The Polis administration has put in motion several efforts to combat greenhouse gas emissions and Gov. Jared Polis signed into law SB19-181 earlier this year, which gives local governments more control over how they regulate the industry within their jurisdictions and directs the state's oil and gas regulatory body to prioritize public health and the environment over the industry. Polis is also trying to put Colorado on track to use 100% renewable energy by 2040.

According to the EPA, the oil and gas industry is responsible for about one-third of the nation's methane emissions. The Trump administration has made several attempts to loosen regulations of the industry.

Weiser, who has challenged several of the administration's new rules or proposed rules, said Thursday that he would fight the latest proposal as well should it go through.

"The EPA's proposal to reverse these standards to curb methane emissions is misguided and ignores the requests from the oil and gas industry to keep them in place," he said in a statement. "As Attorney General, I am committed to protecting Colorado's land, air, and water. To protect our state from the harmful effects of climate change and to protect air quality, Colorado will be part of a legal challenge to the EPA's rollback of the methane standards."

Some oil companies, including Exxon Mobil, have urged the administration to drop the proposal and stick to the regulations. And several environmental groups were sharply critical of the proposal Thursday.

Both Polis and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Executive Director Jill Hunsaker Ryan said they were committed to Colorado's process and supported fighting the Trump administration's proposal.

"This misguided action by the Trump administration flies in the face of the comprehensive and strong steps we've taken in Colorado to curb methane emissions which needlessly waste valuable resources and threaten our health and our environment," Polis said in a statement.

"We won't be deterred by another harmful rollback of federal protections," Hunsaker Ryan said. "We are moving forward assertively with implementing the new Colorado laws because we have to lead as a state."

## Albuquerque Journal

<https://www.abqjournal.com/1360064/epa-proposal-would-roll-back-methane-rules.html>

### **EPA proposal would roll back methane rules**

By Theresa Davis

The Environmental Protection Agency has proposed changes to Obama-era methane rules for oil and natural gas operations, as New Mexico works toward stronger methane regulations for its booming energy industry.

The EPA's proposed changes would reduce or remove methane monitoring requirements from 2012 and 2016 rules for oil and gas pipelines, wells and storage facilities.

Methane is a greenhouse gas that traps heat in the atmosphere. The EPA has acknowledged that it's a contributor to climate change. Methane accounted for 10% of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions in 2017.

U.S. Sen. Tom Udall criticized the new standards in a statement Thursday.

"Methane is a dangerous pollutant and greenhouse gas, and our way of life is under threat from climate change. EPA's decision today is an affront to New Mexicans and people across this country who have a right to clean air," Udall said. "By rolling back commonsense standards that reduce waste and curb air pollution, the administration is moving in the

wrong direction, needlessly jeopardizing the health and safety of our children and most vulnerable communities. We should be strengthening protections for people and the environment from methane, not weakening them.”

New Mexico made national news in 2014 when NASA released satellite images of a methane hot spot the size of Delaware hovering over the Four Corners area. NASA has previously said at least half of the methane cloud was caused by the region’s natural gas industry.

The EPA estimates the proposed changes could save the oil and gas industry \$17 million to \$19 million a year in compliance costs.

New Mexico Oil and Gas Association spokesman Robert McEntyre told the Journal that the rule changes were not rollbacks, as the industry is still reducing methane emissions under a different rule that requires the industry to reduce other pollutants.

“The EPA is streamlining regulations so they’re not duplicative,” McEntyre said. “The EPA is saying, ‘Hey, we don’t have the authority to regulate methane as part of this rule under the Clean Air Act.’ There are no significant changes as far as operations go. Capturing and controlling VOCs (volatile organic compounds) that are produced alongside oil and natural gas is still an urgent priority. In capturing VOCs, we also capture methane.”

In June, the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association released a methane mitigation road map. The group says it supports a cost-effective methane leak detection and repair program for existing facilities. McEntyre referred to 2018 EPA data that shows the state’s oil and gas industry has reduced methane emissions by 51% since 2011, even as production of oil and natural gas increased 31%.

“Our oil and natural gas producers are committed to continuing these trends,” he said.

The Environmental Defense Fund maintains that New Mexico’s oil and gas companies emit about five times more methane pollution than the EPA data suggests.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has tasked state agencies with creating enforceable methane regulations. She labeled the EPA changes as a sign that the Trump administration “continues to look backward on climate.”

“New Mexicans recognize the sanctity of our environment and understand certain responsible safeguards can co-exist with industry,” Lujan Grisham said in a statement. “Our administration is leading by example through our collaboration with stakeholders – the oil and gas industry alongside environmental groups – to develop an enforceable methane mitigation framework that will both protect New Mexicans and recoup wasted revenue for the state’s bottom line. We’re well on our way to finding the balance that protects vital economic interests while significantly addressing the harmful impacts of methane on our public health and our environment – and I regret that the current federal administration is not interested in securing such protections.”

In March, the state’s Environment Department website launched a tracking tool to monitor reports of excessive emissions from New Mexico oil and gas operations. This summer, the state’s Environment Department and Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department hosted public meetings in Farmington, Albuquerque and Carlsbad to discuss methane regulations.

The EPA will hold a public hearing in Texas on the proposed federal amendments.

*Theresa Davis is a Report for America corps member covering water and the environment for the Albuquerque Journal. Visit [reportforamerica.org](http://reportforamerica.org) to learn about the effort to place journalists in local newsrooms around the country.*

# Bloomberg Environment

<https://news.bloombergenvironment.com/environment-and-energy/legal-trouble-could-follow-from-trump-guide-on-climate-reviews>

## **“Legal Trouble Could Follow From Trump Guide on Climate Reviews”**

By Abby Smith

Draft White House guidance that allows federal agencies not to consider the climate change impact of their decisions may entangle them in more lawsuits if they follow that advice.

Environmental critics and industry supporters alike are concerned the June 26 guidance from the White House Council on Environmental Quality may not be enough to shield federal agencies’ decisions on infrastructure and energy projects from being reversed by the courts.

The questions come as federal judges across the country are increasingly scrutinizing agencies’ environmental assessments for lack of analysis of climate change impacts. The Trump administration lost several cases in the past two years because it failed to consider the climate impacts of constructing pipelines, issuing leases for oil and gas development, and expanding coal mines.

The CEQ draft guidance bucks that growing legal precedent, environmentalists and Democratic policymakers say, by giving agencies wide leeway for when they should evaluate and disclose what impact their decisions may have on greenhouse gas emissions.

“This guidance increases the risks of project proponents that do not take climate change seriously and do not invest in a very serious evaluation of potential climate impacts,” David J. Hayes, executive director of New York University’s State Energy and Environmental Impact Center, said in an interview.

### **Industry Seeks Detail**

Agencies that rely on the Trump administration’s guidance to minimize how much they assess climate change impacts “will regret choosing that path,” added Hayes, who served as deputy secretary at the Interior Department in the Obama and Clinton administrations.

Even industry groups supportive of the Trump guidance are asking the the Council on Environmental Quality to include more detail in the final version to more clearly address how agencies can protect themselves from lawsuits. The Edison Electric Institute, which represents investor-owned utilities, said one goal of CEQ guidance “should be to help agencies comply with applicable judicial decisions concerning the sufficiency of [greenhouse gas] emissions assessments undertaken to comply with” the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, according to Aug. 26 comments.

“Legally insufficient NEPA analyses can lead to costly delays and investor uncertainty,” the group added, saying it wanted additional details to ensure reviews are sufficient.

### **Trump Approach**

The Council on Environmental Quality’s draft guidance would replace 2016 guidance from the Obama administration outlining how federal agencies should consider climate change in their analyses under NEPA.

That 1970 law requires federal agencies to take a “hard look” at the environmental impacts of their decisions, including construction of infrastructure and approval of permits for energy projects like pipelines. Agencies comply by completing environmental impact statements or environmental assessments—a process that environmental groups say is necessary to try to mitigate harms from projects, but one that industry complains often slows down development.

The Obama administration's guidance required federal agencies to assess both the impact a decision would have on greenhouse gas emissions, and the effect climate change could have on a potential project. President Donald Trump withdrew that guidance in 2017.

The draft guidance, by contrast, leaves much of the decision-making to the federal agencies about whether and how much to evaluate climate impacts. The document simply urges agencies to quantify an action's projected greenhouse gas emissions when the amount is "substantial enough to warrant quantification, and when it is practicable" to do so.

### **'Kiss of Death'**

But the draft guidance doesn't clearly define what amount is "substantial enough," or how an agency should determine what is "practicable," a move critics say gives agencies a legally dangerous amount of wiggle room.

"It is the kiss of death in any sort of guidance document to not set clear guidance," Christy Goldfuss, senior vice president for energy and environment policy at the Center for American Progress, said in an interview.

"By putting out language that is undefined and does not clarify the intent, you are making it worse," said Goldfuss, who was managing director of the CEQ in 2016 when the Obama administration finished its guidance. "Every single NEPA officer or permitting officer gets to decide what that language means to them."

The guidance, in a way, "codifies some of the worst environmental impact statements and environmental assessments that we've seen," said Jayni Hein, natural resources director at New York University School of Law's Institute for Policy Integrity.

For example, the guidance opens the door to agency arguments that quantifying total emissions is speculative and uncertain, and it discourages agencies from using the social cost of carbon, a tool developed during the Obama administration that prices the environmental impacts of a ton of carbon emissions.

### **More Detail Needed**

Industry groups supportive of the Trump administration guidance are asking the CEQ for more detail.

The Edison Electric Institute, for example, asked the CEQ to outline a "threshold" at which federal agencies must fully quantify or monetize greenhouse gas emissions impacts in order to minimize the risk of future litigation.

But the group declined to provide further details to Bloomberg Environment about what form such a threshold could take.

The Chamber of Commerce in its Aug. 26 comments urged the CEQ to offer more details on what the scope of an agency's review should be "to ensure it provides meaningful comparison between alternatives."

### **Is a Threshold Enough?**

But it's not clear whether identifying a threshold in the guidance would help agencies avoid lawsuits.

The Obama administration, in the draft version of its guidance in 2014, had included a numerical threshold of 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide, above which more robust analysis would be required. But the CEQ eliminated that threshold in the final version.



If the Trump CEQ identifies a threshold, it could be useful in encouraging agencies to quantify climate change impacts in their assessments, but it wouldn't necessarily protect them from lawsuits, Hein, from the Institute for Policy Integrity, said. That's because NEPA requires more than quantification, she said.

Agencies "need to put the emissions in context" with the overall threat of climate change, she said.

## Bloomberg News

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-08-30/trump-epa-methane-rule-rollback-is-too-much-for-oil-companies>

### The Climate Rollback That's Too Much for Big Oil

By Editorial Board

Carbon dioxide is the best-known greenhouse gas, but methane may be more dangerous: One pound can capture up to 84 times as much heat as a pound of carbon dioxide. A byproduct of fossil fuel production as well as agriculture, it's to blame for about a quarter of all manmade global warming.

So when the Environmental Protection Agency announced plans Thursday to roll back regulations curbing methane emissions, environmental groups were quick to object. More surprisingly, some of the world's biggest oil and gas companies complained as well. "[We] have made clear our support of 2016 law," said the president of Shell Oil Co. BP Plc and Exxon Mobil Corp. agreed.

That's partly because the rules introduced under President Barack Obama were hardly onerous. They required oil and gas companies to take action to prevent methane leaks from new wells, pipelines and storage tanks. Methane, unlike carbon dioxide, is a fuel, so companies have reason to do this anyway. And existing wells, which outnumber new ones, would have plenty of time to adapt: The EPA would have taken years to develop new standards for them.

If President Donald Trump's administration has its way, those wells won't need to be checked for leaks. The EPA's own figures show the proposal would cause about 370,000 tons of additional methane emissions between now and 2025 — the equivalent of burning more than 4 million tons of coal. It would save oil and gas companies maybe \$20 million a year — a drop in the bucket for a \$100 billion-plus industry.

No wonder oil majors aren't impressed. To be sure, the industry isn't united in opposition — but the heavyweights understand the costs of bad publicity are more than a few million dollars each year. A backlash is already brewing: One group representing some 140 institutional investors, accounting for a combined \$5.5 trillion of assets, has urged energy companies to ignore the proposed rule.

Businesses can't ignore public opinion as blithely as the Trump administration apparently believes it can. Voters overwhelmingly agree that global warming is happening, is dangerous, and requires government action to stop it. Just last month, major automakers sided with environmentalists against a Trump administration push to relax emissions standards. As consumers increasingly feel the effects of global warming, the pressure will grow. Smart businesses see the writing on the wall.

The public has 60 days to comment on the proposal. Businesspeople, consumers, scientists and environmentalists — all of whom wish to live and prosper on the same warming planet — should make their voices heard.

## Colorado Sun

### Colorado's attorney general vows to sue Trump administration over methane rule rollbacks

By Jesse Paul

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser on Thursday vowed to sue the Trump administration over its decision to roll back methane rules aimed at curbing the release of potent greenhouse gases from oil and gas sites.

The Environmental Protection Agency moved on Thursday to rescind the regulations, put in place under President Barack Obama and modeled after rules enacted by Colorado on the state level in 2014.

Weiser, a Democrat, said in a written statement that “the EPA’s proposal to reverse these standards to curb methane emissions is misguided and ignores the requests from the oil and gas industry to keep them in place.”

He argues that even though Colorado’s methane rules will remain in place, the effect of methane gas on the state from increased emissions elsewhere makes it imperative to challenge the rollback in court.

“Methane emissions don’t stop at state lines,” Weiser’s statement said. “As such, Colorado has a strong interest in regulating the release of this harmful greenhouse gas on a national level.”

If Weiser ultimately joins or files a lawsuit against the Trump administration on the methane rules rollback, it would mark his 11th lawsuit against White House policies.

Gov. Jared Polis also blasted the rollbacks. “Once again, the Trump administration is failing to lead, and it’s up to states like Colorado to drive bold solutions that will protect the health of our communities and address climate change,” he said in a statement.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler said in a statement that the rollback of the 2016 regulations come after President Donald Trump’s directions to remove “unnecessary and duplicative regulatory burdens from the oil and gas industry.”

Exxon Mobil and some other oil giants — wary of blowback from growing public concern over global warming — joined environmental groups in urging the Trump administration not to rescind methane controls, although several state-level and national industry groups welcomed the move.

The step would be the latest in a series of steps unwinding the Obama administration’s efforts to cut climate-changing emissions from the oil, gas and coal industries, including a 2016 rule regulating oil-industry methane leaks as a pollutant under the federal Clean Air Act.

Trump has pushed to open vast expanses of U.S. wilderness and coastline to oil and gas drilling, speed construction of petroleum pipelines and ease regulations on the industry, dismissing calls from scientists in and out of government for rapid cuts in oil, gas and coal emissions to stave off the worst of climate change.

Asked about global warming this week, Trump only lauded the United States’ “tremendous wealth.” “The wealth is under its feet,” he said, praising oil and gas production.

Along with carbon dioxide, methane is a component of natural gas that’s frequently wasted through leaks or intentional releases during drilling operations. While methane survives for less time in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide, it traps far more heat in the atmosphere. Methane does 25 times the damage to the atmosphere over the long term than carbon dioxide, according to the EPA.

The oil and gas industry is the nation’s primary source of methane emissions, according to the EPA, accounting for nearly one-third in 2016.

The Obama-era requirements to find and fix methane leaks imposed “a disproportionate effect on small businesses” in the oil industry, said Erik Milito of the American Petroleum Institute. “A lot of mom and pops would have their wells shut in, elderly people with wells on their properties that could be shut down” under the rules to be rescinded.

But the rollbacks on emissions from oilfields, storage sites and pipelines have split the oil industry, worrying some in the industry about growing blowback in a world increasingly mindful of climate change.

Some oil majors this year urged the administration to crack down — not ease up — on the emissions. They repeated that request Thursday.

Directly regulating methane emissions and driving down leaks is “not only the right thing to do for the environment, there is also a clear business case for doing this,” said Susan Dio, president of BP America, in a statement.

Exxon Mobil spokesman Scott Silvestri said the oil giant would continue urging EPA — as it has since last year — to stick to directly regulating methane emissions from oil and gas facilities.

Asked about those requests, Anne Idsal, the EPA’s acting assistant administrator for air, told reporters, “We don’t preclude anyone from going above and beyond if that’s something they want to do.”

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

## Columbus Dispatch

<https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190829/epas-planned-rollback-of-methane-regulations-met-with-mixed-response>

### **EPA’s planned rollback of methane regulations met with mixed response**

By Beth Burger

The number of natural gas leaks in Ohio could increase after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday it intends to roll back an Obama-era regulation that required oil and gas companies to use technology to detect and repair leaks from wells, pipelines and storage facilities.

“Ohio Environmental Protection Agency should fill in the gap created by this irresponsible rollback,” said Trish Demeter, the Ohio Environmental Council’s chief of staff.

As of June, state records show there had been 38 reported incidents of gas releases and discharges. There were a total 79 incidents in 2018 and 65 incidents in 2017.

In a vast majority of these cases, officials were unable to state how much gas was released.

Under the EPA proposal, methane, the main component of natural gas, would only be indirectly regulated. A separate but related category of gases covered under the Obama-era rules, known as volatile organic compounds, would still be subject to regulation under the new rules.

Overall, carbon dioxide is the most significant greenhouse gas, but methane is a close second. It lingers in the atmosphere for a shorter period of time, but packs a bigger punch while it lasts.

Late last year, Ohio EPA was looking at updating its rules on methane emissions through the agency’s general air permit for new oil and gas facilities.

“The Ohio EPA’s existing program has been effective in monitoring and detecting methane leaks,” Demeter said in response to emailed questions from The Dispatch.

But, she said, the proposal takes the important step of bringing more facilities under its regulations, including alternative oil and gas operations and existing facilities.

"It's critical that Ohio take further steps to curb methane emissions for Ohioans' health and to cut down on this harmful greenhouse gas," she said.

It's unclear if that program will be maintained with the latest proposed federal change.

James Lee, a spokesman for Ohio EPA, told The Dispatch the agency is reviewing the proposed rule to determine how it could affect Ohio's existing program, which he said is effective at keeping methane controlled.

"Ohio implemented a leak detection and repair program designed to identify and repair equipment leaks before many states, and well before U.S. EPA required such a program," Lee said.

He said oil and gas operations of any significant size are required to go through the state's strict permit process, which includes extensive monitoring, testing and reporting requirements, as well as tight restrictions on emissions and more.

Thursday's announcement about methane emissions is the latest of more than 80 EPA rule changes since Trump took office.

The oil and gas industry has been divided about the proposed change.

Erik Milito, a vice president at the American Petroleum Institute, a trade group representing the industry, praised the proposed rule, saying, "We think it's a smarter way of targeting methane emissions."

However, Exxon wrote to the EPA last year urging the agency to maintain core elements of the Obama-era policy. And, in March, Gretchen Watkins, the United States chairwoman for Shell, said the EPA should impose rules that will both regulate existing methane emissions and future methane emissions.

On Thursday, Marathon Petroleum Corp. told The Dispatch it planned to adhere to environmental guidelines even if the rules regarding methane emissions change at the federal level.

"We have adopted a stringent leak detection and repair program at our gas processing and fractionation plants that is expected to reduce our methane emissions by another 1,500 metric tonnes per year," said Jamal Kheiry, a communications manager for Marathon, adding that the company's emissions of volatile organic compounds are below the industry standard as well.

The Ohio Oil and Gas Association agreed that the industry can and does go beyond government restrictions.

"The health and safety of those who live or work around facilities is always our top priority, which is why the industry continues to voluntarily put measures, protocol and technology in place at facilities to protect the communities we operate in and our environment," said Matt Hammond, executive vice president of the industry group.

The Daily Signal

<https://www.dailysignal.com/2019/08/29/trump-administration-eases-methane-rules-on-oil-industry/>

**Trump Administration Eases Methane Rules on Oil Industry**

By Fred Lucas

The Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday that it will undo some of the Obama administration's regulations on methane, which it said could save oil and natural gas producers up to \$123 million through 2025.

In 2016, the Obama administration imposed limits on methane emissions from oil and gas production after determining that methane emissions were increasing along with the boom in hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to reach oil or natural gas.

The EPA published the revision in the Federal Register, and it is now open to 60 days of public comment.

The proposed new rule is a result of an executive order from President Donald Trump that the administration said was designed to promote energy independence and economic growth.

That order directs federal agencies to review existing regulations that potentially "burden the development or use of domestically produced energy resources," including oil and natural gas.

"EPA's proposal delivers on President Trump's executive order and removes unnecessary and duplicative regulatory burdens from the oil and gas industry," EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said in a prepared statement.

"The Trump administration recognizes that methane is valuable, and the industry has an incentive to minimize leaks and maximize its use," Wheeler said. "Since 1990, natural gas production in the United States has almost doubled while methane emissions across the natural gas industry have fallen by nearly 15%. Our regulations should not stifle this innovation and progress."

Among other things, the proposed rule would remove all sources in the transmission and storage segment of the oil and natural gas industry from regulation, both for ozone-forming volatile organic compounds and for greenhouse gases.

The change also would rescind the methane requirements in the 2016 regulation that apply to sources in the production and processing segments of the industry.

House Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone Jr., D-N.J., attacked the proposed rule as "unconscionable," and noted major oil companies support keeping the Obama regulations.

"Even for an administration with a pattern of catering to corporate polluters, the proposal to eliminate federal government requirements limiting methane emissions is wildly irresponsible and reckless," Pallone said in a written statement, adding:

*Many within the fossil fuel industry understand this, and that's why Exxon, Shell, and BP America urged EPA to maintain rigorous methane rules. Yet the Trump administration is defying science, common sense, and the express concerns of major industry players to disassemble critical public health and safety protections.*

Supporters of the move see it differently.

The Obama regulations were "heavy-handed" and a "nonsolution in search of a problem" said Nick Loris, energy and environment economist at The Heritage Foundation.

The EPA under the Trump administration "is wise to right size them," Loris said in a statement released by the think tank, adding:

*Energy producers have an incentive to capture and sell methane, the main component in natural gas, because it has economic value—yielding low-cost energy for consumers and reducing the United States' allies dependence on Russian gas. The EPA even notes methane emissions from the industry have fallen despite the fact [that] energy production has*

*skyrocketed. Furthermore, states have implemented their own rules and the private sector is taking voluntary action to capture methane.*

The EPA said its regulatory impact analysis estimated the amendments would save the oil and natural gas industry between \$17 million and \$19 million a year, totaling between \$97 million and \$123 million from this year through 2025.

Forbes

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/priyashukla/2019/08/29/what-are-the-implications-of-increased-methane-emissions/#1f17b3794d88>

### **What Are The Implications Of Increased Methane Emissions?**

By Priya Shukla

Earlier today, the Environmental Protection Agency announced plans to reduce federal oversight of methane that the oil and gas industry emits, focus predominantly on volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that threaten public and environmental health, and loosen regulations on the transmission and storage of oil and gas products.\* Essentially, this change would mean that the EPA is no longer required to regulate oil and gas production, which makes up the majority of methane emissions.

While this could potentially save the industry \$10 million per year, it would also result in 370,000 short tons of methane being emitted into the atmosphere between 2019 and 2025, which is equivalent to the amount of carbon dioxide produced by nine million cars on an annual basis. VOCs would also increase by 10,000 short tons.

While the Independent Petroleum Association of America supports this move and suggests it will be particularly beneficial for small-scale energy producers that make up over 75% of oil sources, larger corporations including Shell, BP & Exxon Mobil do not support the repeal of these Obama-era standards. Many environmental groups and former EPA employees also rebuked the rule changes. Earthjustice plans to sue the administration so that the methane emission guidelines can be re-instated.

Concerns about excess methane emissions are steeped in its potency as a greenhouse gas. Although carbon dioxide is largely driving global climate change, methane has 80 times the capacity to trap heat that carbon dioxide does and comprises 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, increasing methane emissions could prevent global temperature increases from being capped at 1.5°C to 2°C, as outlined in the Paris Accord.

Natural resource extraction is not the only manmade source of methane. The cattle industry is responsible for over one-third of global methane emissions. There are over one billion cattle around the world and each cow is capable of belching between 70 and 120 kg of methane each year.

Inside Climate News

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/29082019/methane-regulation-oil-gas-storage-pipelines-epa-rollback-trump-wheeler>

### **Trump EPA Tries Again to Roll Back Methane Rules for Oil and Gas Industry**

By Marianne Lavelle

In its latest retreat from federal action on climate change, the Trump administration on Thursday proposed eliminating federal requirements that oil and gas companies control leaks of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from new wells, storage facilities and pipelines.

In doing so, the Environmental Protection Agency also proposed a narrower interpretation of its legal authority to regulate air pollution from the oil and gas industry.

The agency proposed both rescinding the methane requirements and removing regulation of transmission and storage facilities from its purview under the Clean Air Act. Experts say it's an attempt by President Donald Trump's administration to stymie future regulation of emissions from existing oil and gas operations—a much larger problem than the emissions from new facilities.

In announcing the proposal, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler, a former coal lobbyist, said the methane regulations were "unnecessary," and he stressed that removing them would save the industry money. Both arguments have been common themes in the administration's long-running effort to roll back environmental protections related to oil and gas industry pollution.

The EPA said it concluded that the industry already had sufficient incentive to stop leaks because methane, the main component of natural gas, can be captured and sold for fuel. But studies have consistently shown that methane is leaking into the atmosphere from oil and gas operations; for some companies, the money they can make from selling low-priced natural gas is not worth the cost of additional monitoring and better equipment.

The EPA acknowledged that its proposal, if adopted, would result in the release of an additional 370,000 short tons of methane annually—equivalent to the emissions of 1.8 million additional passenger vehicles per year.

But the Trump administration has a new method of calculating the harm of climate change that deeply discounts the future costs of that pollution. Using its new method, the EPA concluded that the savings to industry—\$17 to \$19 million a year—far outweighed the additional costs that methane pollution would create.

In contrast, when the methane rules were put into place during President Barack Obama's final year of office, the agency had calculated their climate benefits at about \$690 million a year, far outweighing the additional cost to the industry of implementing additional leak detection and repairs.

### **EPA's Latest Attempt to Change Methane Rules**

The so-called "New Source Performance Standards" for the oil and gas industry were meant to be a key element of the Obama climate legacy—part of a package of actions on methane, a short-lived climate pollutant many times more potent than carbon dioxide, that was crucial to meeting the U.S. commitment under the Paris climate accord.

The new proposal marks the fourth time that the Trump EPA has taken aim at the same set of regulations. After a federal court early on made clear that former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt could not simply suspend the rules, the agency initiated a formal review of the rules. Then, last fall, it proposed weakening them.

The latest plan takes a markedly different approach—eliminating standards on methane altogether.

The Obama rules sought to control methane from all aspects of oil and gas operations, including the transmission and storage facilities where leak rates are believed to be high. But the Trump EPA said the agency had no authority to do this under the Clean Air Act, unless it made an entirely separate formal finding that emissions from transmission and storage facilities were harmful to human health and the environment.

"This proposed approach is a blatant attempt to divide the oil and gas sector into pieces to make it easier for them to ignore the sector's overall methane emissions and allow the sector to operate without EPA oversight," said Darin Schroeder, associate attorney for the Clean Air Task Force, an environmental group.

The Trump administration's Interior Department also has rolled back regulations on methane emissions from oil and gas operations on federal land, where leaks also result in the loss of royalties income to the U.S. Treasury, in addition to pollution. That rollback, finalized after efforts by former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to shortcut the regulatory process, is now being challenged in federal court in California by environmental groups and states.

Wheeler on Thursday repeated figures often used by the oil and gas industry—production has almost doubled since 1990, while methane emissions have fallen 15 percent. "Our regulations should not stifle this innovation and progress," he said.

"Under this proposal, the oil and natural gas sector will continue to be effectively regulated," Erik Milito, vice president of upstream and industry operations for the American Petroleum Institute, said in a prepared statement. The EPA has proposed keeping in place regulation of smog-producing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from production and processing, which he said "drives down methane emissions and allows for innovation and technological advancements that help environmental performance and strengthen industry's actions to reduce emissions."

But recent research suggests that methane emissions from oil and gas operations are significantly underreported. A study published in the journal Science in 2018 concluded that the amount of methane leaking from the nation's oil and gas fields may be 60 percent higher than official estimates. The authors estimated that methane equivalent to 2.3 percent of all the natural gas produced in the nation is leaking during the production, processing and transportation of oil and gas every year.

Such results underscore the Trump administration's error in concluding that market incentives are sufficient to control fugitive methane emissions in the oil and gas industry, said Peter Zalzal, a lawyer with the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), which was involved in the study.

"Even for the measures that pay for themselves, though, there is evidence demonstrating that companies don't always pursue them," Zalzal said. "Ultimately, the science shows us that oil and gas sector methane emissions are higher than official inventories project; that they can be reduced using low-cost and available technologies; and that voluntary actions haven't made the urgent progress that we need to make in addressing these harms."

### **Not All Oil and Gas Companies Oppose the Rules**

The oil and gas industry has not been unified in its opposition to the methane rules.

Some companies, including BP, have invested in control technology, and have sought to demonstrate its effectiveness in controlling greenhouse gas emissions as they promote natural gas as a fuel that can cut carbon emissions from coal.

"BP has been clear in its position that EPA should directly regulate methane emissions from new and existing sources," the oil giant said in a statement. "We believe this is the most effective way to protect the environment and maximize the benefits of natural gas."

States like Colorado and Pennsylvania have also put in place their own rules to control methane emissions, increasing the complexity for companies that operate in many different locations.

"This is another example of EPA responding to a subset of companies in a fossil intensive industry to roll back sensible measures," said Janet McCabe, who served as acting assistant administrator for the EPA's air office during the Obama administration and is now a senior law fellow at the Environmental Law and Policy Center in Indiana. She said methane is "without a doubt contributing to changes in our climate."

*InsideClimate News reporter Sabrina Shankman contributed to this story.*



NBC-Lubbock

<https://www.kcbd.com/2019/08/30/arrington-epa-officials-announce-proposal-new-methane-rule/>

### **Arrington, EPA officials announce proposal of new methane rule**

On Thursday, Congressman Jodey Arrington (TX-19) joined Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 Deputy Administrator David Gray to announce the proposal of a new EPA rule to provide regulatory relief for energy producers in West Texas and throughout the United States. The proposed rule would eliminate duplicate regulations on methane emissions during the transmission and storage of oil and natural gas, which place an unnecessary and harmful economic burden on small and independent energy producers while providing no environmental benefit.

Congressman Arrington praised the rollback of these regulations as a major win for West Texas energy producers.

*"The heart of America's economic prosperity and unrivaled security is an abundant, affordable, and reliable supply of domestic energy. The energy revolution and, in particular, the innovations in technology we have seen from industry leaders here in West Texas in recent years have advanced our nation's energy security while creating a significant reduction in carbon emissions. Today's proposed rule will reduce unnecessary and burdensome regulations, empowering our energy producers to continue to lead the way in our nation's energy dominance and environmental stewardship," said Arrington.*

*"The Obama administration's midnight regulation on the oil and gas industry would have cost hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs for our small and independent energy producers with no real environmental impact. I applaud President Trump and the EPA for finding meaningful ways to balance the stewardship of our environment and economic growth, leaving our nation safer, stronger, and cleaner for our children and grandchildren."*

*"Standing here today in Lubbock, it's clear that community leaders and businesses are counting on us to enact reasonable, responsible rules that protect the health of the community and encourage economic growth," said EPA Deputy Regional Administrator David Gray.*

*"This proposed action will ensure that communities where oil and gas activities take place, here and across the nation, will continue to thrive."*

Politico

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2019/08/methane-rollback-could-handcuff-future-rules-1694113>

### **Methane rollback could handcuff future rules**

By Alex Guillen

The Trump administration is pursuing a narrow interpretation of the Clean Air Act that could prevent future presidents from using EPA to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from a wide variety of industries.

The approach is outlined in EPA's proposed rollback of Obama-era oil and gas methane rules. The new proposal argues EPA erred in the previous administration by using a catch-all provision of the law to regulate methane pollution from the oil and gas sector, and it builds on questions EPA first raised in its December proposal easing carbon dioxide requirements for newly built coal-fired power plants.

The core issue is the threshold at which any given source category — such as oil and gas producers — “contributes significantly” to air pollution that endangers human health and welfare.

"Congress has made clear that in order to be subject to regulation, the emissions must have a greater impact than a simple contribution," EPA wrote in Thursday's proposal. The agency would thus have "discretion" to determine just what level of contribution is significant.

The Trump administration's Thursday proposal cites procedural issues to dump all methane requirements for oil and gas producers, despite objections from major companies like Exxon Mobil, Shell and Equinor. And environmentalists worry the administration is attempting to stymie any future EPA climate regulations against other sectors.

Critics say the agency is overlooking its mandate to protect the public and the environment, potentially opening the rule to eventually being overturned in court.

"Today's announcement represents EPA's latest — and most radical — attempt to avoid its responsibilities to address the known and judicially-confirmed dangers of climate pollution by regulating industry sources of greenhouse gas emissions," said David Hayes, the former deputy Interior secretary who now runs the State Energy & Environmental Impact Center at NYU School of Law. "The administration will not get away with it."

The threshold question is being watched carefully by industries that also emit major amounts of greenhouse gases, including refineries, petrochemical manufacturers, cement producers and iron and steel makers. Those sectors have long wondered if they would be next in line for regulation once EPA had finished rules covering the top stationary source of greenhouse gases — power plants.

In its proposal, EPA specifically asked for comments on what criteria to use when determining that pollution from a source category "significantly contributes to air pollution which may reasonably be anticipated to endanger in the context of CAA section 111." Among other things, EPA wonders whether it can or should set a "single percentage criterion" that establishes that threshold, or whether it must depend on factors such as the "nature of the pollutant" and the number of source categories that emit it.

Anne Idsal, EPA's acting air chief, told reporters Thursday that EPA was able to walk back the methane requirements without having to answer the deeper questions about the significant contribution threshold.

"So primarily and from a legal standpoint, that issue needs to be addressed, we believe, before we can move forward in terms of regulating that gas within this particular source set," Idsal said.

Peter Zalzal, the Environmental Defense Fund's lead attorney, said the questions raised by EPA Thursday could lead to a new, tighter legal interpretation affecting other industries.

"EPA has raised a bunch of questions in this alternative that could touch on other industries," he said.

In walking back the methane requirements for oil and gas producers, the rule also argues EPA must make such a "significant contribution" finding virtually any time it applies or expands climate regulations in the future — additional steps that add potential regulatory wiggle room.

EPA's regulatory definition of the oil and gas industry previously had included only production and processing operations, the stages where "raw" gas is pulled from the ground and propane, butane and other "natural gas liquids" are removed before the gas is sent into pipelines. Two Obama-era rules simply expanded that definition to include pollution from pipeline transmission and storage in new regulations imposing volatile organic compounds and methane limits.

However, EPA now says that expansion was “not appropriate” because the agency did not first formally determine that methane emissions from those segments of the industry make a significant contribution to pollution that endangers public health and welfare.

That procedural argument justified revoking methane rules for transmission and storage, EPA said.

Meanwhile, the agency justified revoking methane requirements for the production and processing segments of the industry by arguing those rules were “entirely redundant” in the first place. VOC pollution controls also curb methane, meaning revoking the methane requirements “will not affect the amount of methane emission reductions that those requirements will achieve,” according to EPA.

Production and processing together account for 72 percent of the gas sector’s methane emissions, according to EPA’s annual greenhouse gas inventory. Transmission and storage makes up 20 percent.

EPA also proposed an alternative choice for public comment: keeping transmission and storage as covered sources subject to VOC rules, but revoking the methane rules for the entire oil and gas source category.

Former EPA air adviser Mandy Gunasekara, who now runs the pro-Trump advocacy group Energy 45, said the administration is rooting out red tape.

“This approach requires more work but EPA under the leadership of Administrator [Andrew] Wheeler is committed to getting right the delicate balance between unleashing American energy and keeping our environment healthy,” she said in a statement.

Ben Lefebvre contributed to this report.

## Time

<https://time.com/5664449/epa-methane-emissions-rule/>

### **The Trump Administration Just Loosened Methane Emissions Rules. Here's What To Know**

By Madeleine Carlisle

On Thursday, the Environmental Protection Agency announced plans to loosen regulations on methane, a potent greenhouse gas known to propel climate change.

The EPA, which is part of the Trump Administration, said in a press release that it intends to loosen Obama-era national standards on the extraction of oil and natural gas, which had been implemented to limit methane from leaking into the atmosphere.

“EPA’s proposal delivers on President Trump’s executive order and removes unnecessary and duplicative regulatory burdens from the oil and gas industry,” EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said in the statement.

The EPA also said it would challenge the legal footing the federal government has used to regulate methane as a pollutant.

Environmental groups have decried the move, and even powerful oil and gas companies including Shell have previously urged the Trump Administration to not rollback regulations.

**Where does methane come from?**

Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas that is produced both naturally and by a range of industrial and human activities, explains Michael Mann, a professor of atmospheric science at Penn State.

He says the degree of methane that's produced by natural sources — like swamps or sheep or cows — is usually “more or less balanced,” because the natural methane that's produced oxidizes in the atmosphere and breaks down.

But over the past decade, Mann says the amount of methane in the atmosphere has increased. According to NASA, the concentration of methane in the atmosphere has risen by about 25 teragrams per year since 2006.

A 2016 study found that methane levels were reaching the highest levels in at least two decades.

“We’re upsetting the balance now, it’s increasing,” he explains. “We’re adding methane to the atmosphere faster than those processes can take it out.”

Mann says that the two primary contributors to the “pretty dramatic uptick” of methane in the atmosphere have been hydraulic fracturing — also known as fracking — and the increasing amount of livestock-raised dairy and meat consumption.

Ruminant animals, such as cows and sheep, have digestive systems different than humans that naturally emit methane, explains William Ruddiman, a professor emeritus of environmental sciences at the University of Virginia. An increasing number of cows and sheep have led to an increase in methane.

Fracking, a technique used by oil and gas companies to access subsurface oil and natural gas deposits known as shale formations, entails breaking up rock and injecting liquid to allow the oil and gas that's trapped underneath to be released. Methane is a valuable product captured in that process.

“But they don’t capture all that methane. Some of it makes its way into the atmosphere,” Mann says.

### **What impact does methane gas have on the environment?**

Methane is the second-most powerful greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide, explains Ruddiman.

According to Mann, while it's less abundant than carbon dioxide, it's much more potent when it comes to trapping heat.

On a time scale of 20 years, methane is more than 80 times as powerful as the same amount of carbon dioxide, David Doniger, the senior strategic director for the climate and clean energy program at the advocacy non-profit the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), tells TIME.

However, methane doesn't stay in the atmosphere for nearly as long as carbon dioxide.

“A century down the road ... the methane we’re all producing right now, that’ll all be gone. Methane tends to disappear on a time scale of a decade or so,” Mann says. Much of the carbon dioxide humans put into the atmosphere, on the other hand, will be there for more than 1,000 years, he says.

However, Mann urges, “If we are to really tackle the climate crisis, we’re going to need to get both carbon dioxide and methane under control.”

### **Why is the Trump Administration reversing limits on methane gas?**

The Trump Administration's plan would loosen restrictions imposed by the Obama Administration on the extraction of oil and natural gas, which attempted to limit methane and other hydrocarbons from leaking during transfer and storage.

The Obama-era regulation, issued in 2016, imposed the rules on any new operations extracting natural gas in the United States, Doniger explains. He says it also legally obligated the EPA to impose those same rules on already-existing operations, which make up the majority of the oil and gas operations in the country.

In Thursday's statement announcing the rollback, the EPA sold the change as a cost-saving measure. "The proposal would remove regulatory duplication and save the industry millions of dollars in compliance costs each year — while maintaining health and environmental regulations on oil and gas sources that the agency considers appropriate." It estimated that the proposal would save the oil and natural gas industry \$97 to \$123 million between 2019 and 2025.

The statement points to other existing regulation that limit the leaking of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) — or compounds that easily turn into vapor or gas — that are still in effect, and argues those regulations would protect against methane.

Doniger says that while it's true there are other regulations in place, he says they only effect new operations, and would not impact existing ones. "So they'd be giving the new sources a rollback, and the existing sources a free pass against the obligations that currently is there but hasn't been fulfilled."

### **How are people reacting to the rollback?**

The decision was swiftly denounced by environmental activists and others concerned about [climate change](#).

"This reckless rollback pours fuel on the flames of a world on fire," Kassie Siegel, director of the Center for Biological Diversity's Climate Law Institute, said in a statement.

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra hinted at legal action: "We're ready to fight this senseless decision by the EPA."

The NRDC's Doniger also said in a statement that "if EPA moves forward with this reckless and sinister proposal, we will see them in court."

The oil and gas industry has historically been split on methane regulation — many smaller companies lobbied for them, while some larger companies publicly supported more government regulation, citing climate change.

In March, BP America President Susan Dio wrote in [an op-ed](#) in the *Houston Chronicle* that regulating methane "is the right thing to do for the planet." She also called methane leaks the industry's "Achilles heel."

In a [statement](#) in September, Shell announced plans to limit its methane emissions, and ExxonMobil [reportedly](#) asked the EPA to regulate emissions of methane in December.

### **What does this mean for the climate?**

In a call with reporters on Thursday, Anne Idsal, assistant administrator of the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, said the Obama-era regulations had added "pretty considerable extra costs to domestic energy production while providing just minimal environmental benefit." She also said that while natural gas production in the U.S. has almost doubled since 1990, methane emissions from the natural gas industry has fallen by near 15%.

"We fully expect those ongoing downward trends in emissions to continue," she said. The EPA also said it will open a 60-day comment period on the proposal, and schedule a hearing.

However, Mann says the rollback is just a part of “a total full-frontal attack on environmental regulation under the current Administration.” He points to the EPA’s loosening of limits on carbon emissions, and the Administration’s desire to provide subsidies to the coal industry.

Other environmental experts and advocates also worry about the consequences of Thursday’s announcement.

“Today’s actions will create a tremendous amount of additional pollution we didn’t need to have, both from existing wells and new wells,” Siegel tells TIME.

“You cannot curb the climate change problem, you cannot avoid catastrophic warming, if you don’t curb methane along with carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases,” says NRDC’s Doniger.

“This is an unnecessary leap backwards,” adds Rob Jackson, an environmental scientist at Stanford.

“Very few people in the public or the industry want this rollback.”

## Washington Examiner

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/climate-hawk-house-republicans-oppose-trump-rollback-of-obama-methane-rule>

### **Climate hawk House Republicans oppose Trump rollback of Obama methane rule**

By Josh Siegel

Leading House Republicans who back federal policies to curb climate change say they oppose the Trump administration's move Thursday to eliminate direct federal regulation of methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

“I have serious concerns about this decision by the EPA,” Rep. Francis Rooney of Florida told the *Washington Examiner*.

Rooney is the chairman of the bipartisan House Climate Solutions Caucus and the leading Republican proponent in Congress of a carbon tax.

The Environmental Protection Agency proposed a rule to reverse regulations imposed by the Obama administration in 2016 requiring oil and gas companies to install technologies to inspect and repair wells, pipelines, and storage facilities that leak methane. Methane, the main component of natural gas, is more potent than carbon dioxide, although its emissions don’t last as long in the atmosphere.

Rep. Garret Graves of Louisiana, the top Republican on the House Select Climate Crisis Committee, also said he opposes EPA's proposed action to stop direct federal regulation of methane.

In an interview with the *Washington Examiner*, Graves was asked if he supports the EPA's decision.

“I don't think I do. No. Based upon the reports, I do have some concerns at this point,” Graves said.

Graves added: “Methane has greater global warming potential than many other greenhouse gases. To the extent we can sensibly capture fugitive emissions, we should do it.”

Rooney noted that major companies have warned the Trump administration that limiting federal oversight over methane leaks damages the industry’s reputation. Some individual companies, such as Shell, BP, and Exxon, urged the EPA to keep Obama-era regulations targeting methane leaks, instead of weakening them.

"Even the major oil companies agree that this rule rollback is unnecessary," Rooney said. "The only entities pushing this change are certain independent producers who do not want to spend the money to comply with the higher standards that provide greater protection for our environment."

## Yahoo Finance

<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/oil-majors-unhappy-methane-regulation-210000599.html>

### Oil Majors Unhappy With Methane Regulation Rollback

By Nick Cunningham

On Thursday, the U.S. EPA announced a plan to roll back federal rules on methane emissions for oil and gas companies, a gift that some in the industry are not sure that they want. The decision carries threatening implications for the climate, but it is also not without risk for the industry itself.

The proposed rule, according to [the Wall Street Journal](#), would undo Obama-era standards that require companies to curtail methane emissions from their operations, including at drilling sites, pipelines and processing facilities. Instead of taking into account methane from the whole supply chain, the proposal would divide upstream operations from midstream, and once divided, the EPA concludes that methane emissions from each does not warrant regulation.

The Trump administration argues that it will save the oil and gas industry between [\\$17 million and \\$19 million per year](#), which is a pittance to an industry worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

It's another example of the Trump administration going to more aggressive lengths at deregulation than the industry benefiting from the decisions actually wants. For instance, Trump's plans to roll back fuel economy standards has run into opposition from automakers, some of which have abandoned Trump's efforts and have instead joined California in [supporting stricter requirements](#).

The regulatory rollback presents another setback to climate change efforts. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, more than 80 times powerful than CO2 over a 20-year period. Methane accounts for [about 10 percent](#) of U.S. total greenhouse gas emissions, much of which [comes from the oil and gas industry](#). According to a recent Wall Street Journal [analysis](#), methane emissions from the U.S. energy industry has the greenhouse gas equivalent of 69 million cars.

"There is overwhelming scientific evidence that methane is harmful -- more harmful than we thought -- and the oil and gas sector is a bigger contributor to that pollution than we thought," [said](#) Peter Zalzal with the Environmental Defense Fund, according to Bloomberg.

Trump's EPA is simply not concerned with it. "I don't see that there's going to be some big climate concern here," said Anne Idsal, the acting assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, according to the Wall Street Journal.

The American Petroleum Institute [praised](#) the rollback, saying that it welcomes "smart regulations." But some oil majors have called for stricter standards. Companies like ExxonMobil, BP and Royal Dutch Shell have growing interests in natural gas production (Exxon is one of the largest gas producers in the country). Having stricter standards on methane leaks – or at least the perception that a strong regulatory regime is in place – is viewed as critical to selling gas in a carbon-constrained world.

Smaller oil and gas companies argue that the rules are too expensive, but some of the majors fear a loss of credibility due to the rollback. BP wrote an [op-ed](#) earlier this year saying that it's "essential that the EPA regulate methane emissions." In late 2018, Exxon [called](#) on the EPA to regulate methane. Some in the oil industry uneasy with the deregulation also fear years of legal mess from the effort – environmental groups are sure to sue.

The EPA apparently shrugged off those pleas, and is moving to deregulate. Some experts believe the move will trash the industry's reputation.

If oil and gas industry isn't willing to do the work to capture its own methane leakage, everything else it says about CCS, sustainability, 2 degrees, etc is total bullshit <https://nyti.ms/2ztKzs6>

Industry groups and the EPA argue that methane regulations are not needed because oil and gas producers have every incentive to capture natural gas so they can sell the product. But the evidence to date does not back that up. [Flaring](#) in the Permian [continues to break records](#), while Texas regulators sit idly by, which suggests that drillers want to press forward with drilling, regardless of whether or not they capture all the gas coming out of the ground.

Ultimately, the industry is fooling itself if it thinks the Trump administration is going to have the last word on methane. The Democratic [presidential candidates have called for a lot more](#) than methane regulation. An effort to gut even these modest rules could spark an even greater backlash.

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